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MINOR ARTS OF DECORATION.

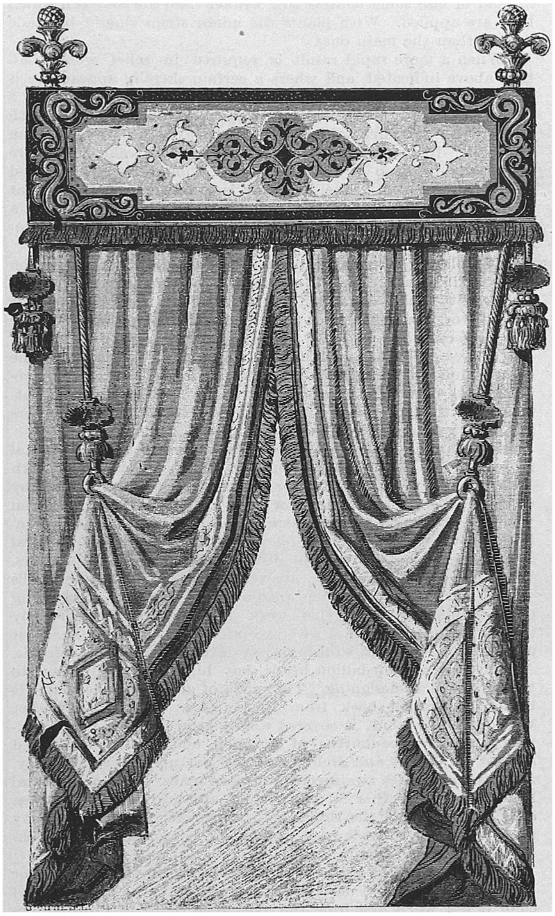
By James Carruthers.

THE art of veneering holds prominent rank in the decorative world, for by its aid wainscotings and furniture of unattractive substances are brought to bear the appearance of consisting of handsomely covered and figured woods. Throughout the same growth of timber similar colors and configurations are repeated. The cabinet maker turns this fact to account by utilizing the thin sheets of same. The wood must be well seasoned and free from knots and shokes. The best woods for these negative qualities are mahogany and American walnut. The wood is toothed in the direction and crosswise of the grain, and defects filled up with plaster of Paris mixed with glue. Such woods as mahogagy, oak, chestnut, maple, sycamore, birch and satinwood are ready for cutting as received from the merchant. The next process to toothing is flatting, effected by screwing the wood between blocks of pine. The pieces are then cut to shape with a chisel and straight edge and strips of paper are glued over them on one side. The veneer now proceeds to jointing, placing the veneer in the position it will appear when laid and seeing that the pieces match. If he has to have one joint with two veneers, or two joints with four veneers, he must see that the grain of the wood forms a figure having both sides alike. The jointed edges being arranged are tacked down on a deal board, and paper glued over the joints.

There are two ways of laying veneer, by means of a caul or a veneering hammer. The former is made of pine or cedar, of the same size as the surface to be veneered, is covered with zinc, and operated by screws and cramps, by which any amount of pressure is brought to bear. The sides of the pieces having been healed and then brought together an equable pressure is applied by the caul over the whole surface; and blistering of the veneer is detected as soon as the caul is removed, by the hollow sound given forth on tapping with the finger. Cauls are shaped for level, concave and convex surfaces. Steam is largely applied to bending veneer wood, so as to correspond to curved grounds. Veneering with the hammer is on smaller surfaces and for such woods as satinwood and rosewood, which will not admit the pressure of the caul. The veneer wood is attached to its intended ground with glue.

Whilst pictorial mosaic work has made slow progress in the way of adoption in this country, less in consequence of costliness than the limitations prescribed by the conditions that determine its advantageous display, this cannot be affirmed of one department of fictile art—that of decorated tiles. We have imported and home manufactured tiles that display the assiduous care continuously exercised to bring these to the highest

BRACKET IN WROUGHT IRON.



MODERN RENAISSANCE DRAPERY.

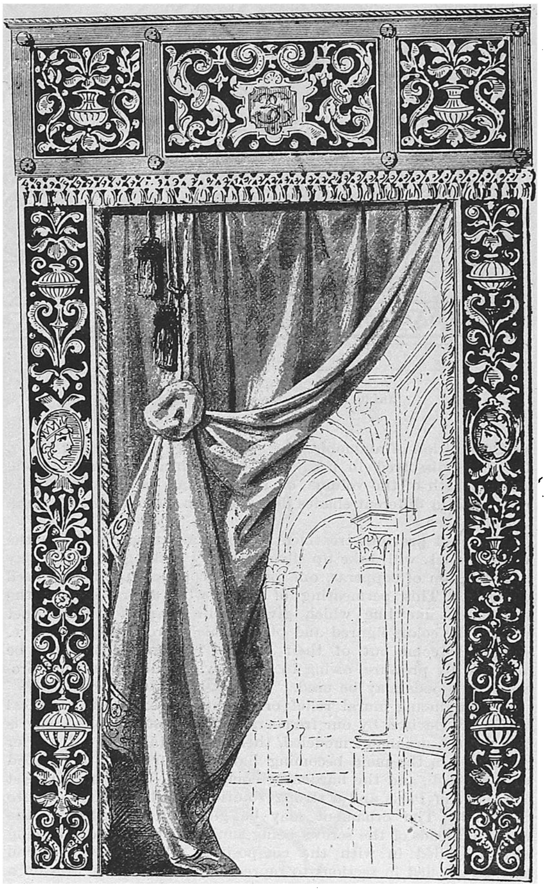
point of excellence. Encaustic tiles have figures in relief upon their surfaces, with the colors burned in. The manufacture involves more labor than is bestowed on any other sort, excepting those decorated by hand. The figures are arranged in different colored clays and the whole is then pressed and burned. They are made both glazed and unglazed, the latter for more strictly decorative purposes. Printed or transfer tiles are made of bisque and the figure is transferred by a peculiar process of printing, after which they are baked and glazed, the glazing, as in the case of encaustic tiles, being done by dipping them in a solution containing flint and other hard surfacing materials. These tiles are used for decorative purposes only.

Art tiles are the finest made, and have for their base a fine quality of porcelain, which is embellished by hand painting and afterwards baked. So far French artists have taken the lead in these painted designs, men of high genius, already famous on the canvas, not disdaining thus to perpetuate their skill in fictile art. The material and the firing impart a soft lustrousness to the coloring, which at times appear to shine out of translucent depths. Atmosphere and distance are finely rendered, and the brilliant plumage of birds appears through the glazing to come closely to the natural scene. It is as mantel jambs and plinths that these tiles appear to best advantage. Complete tableaux are represented in sectional pieces; the division of the tiles, so far from marring these, please as suggestive of the constructional character of the mantel of which they form an essential portion.

Pine is so extensively used for wainscoting that it will be of service to decorators to point out a means by which it may be attractively mottled. The stain is thus composed: Put in an earthenware vessel an ounce of Vandyke brown, four ounces of pearl ash, two drachms of dragon's blood, and add two ounces of boiling water. When cold the preparation is to be applied with a flannel rubber. The quantities here given are merely such as will afford a sample; the same relative proportions being of course observed when the stain is made on a larger scale.

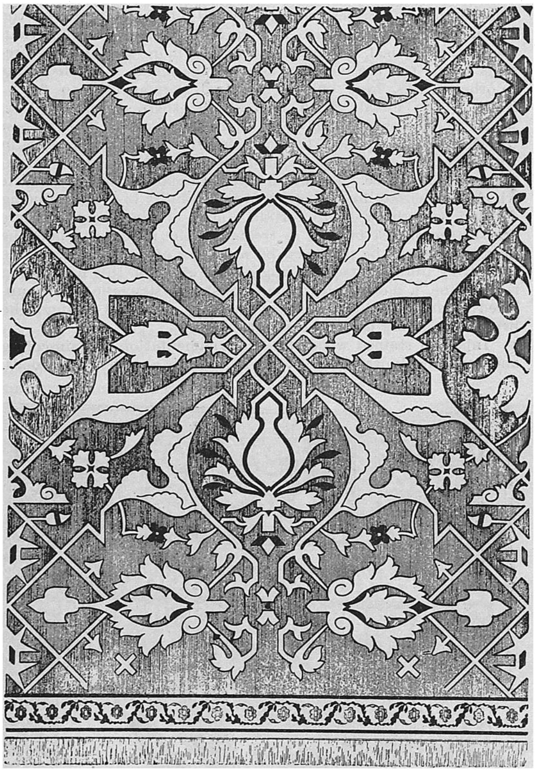
Undoubtedly the readiest means for imparting a polish to cabinet woods is by means of shellac varnish. This is preferable to oil, which will eventually work out and dull the surface, but the baffling difficulty with shellac is to secure a lustrous, neutral and perfectly transparent film. The best varnish is that which whilst free from any tinge of its own displays the least white light. It is therefore of importance to learn a mode by which the object may be gained. The shellac is to be placed in broken pieces in a vessel and covered up with a concentrated solution of ammonia. The whole is then to be boiled in a water bath. It will soon become a spongy mass, from which the air is expelled by further boiling. On pouring hot water on it the shellac is precipitated, and the soapy matter on the surface having been removed, the neutral solution is ready for application.

There are many branches of decoration in which gold is used where gold leaf would be inapplicable, whether from the delicacy of the work, or its character, or the effect sought to be obtained. Gold reduced to infinitesimal particles and mixed with a fluid volatile vehicle, stripes into the pores of the texture of the densest substances to which it is applied, is more enduring than the overlaying leaf, and when burnished more brilliant. It presents to the full the metallic lustre of the metal. Applied thus to other metals, heat only is required permanently to fix it. Brass is the metal which beyond all others, excepting silver, which would appear to have an affinity for gold. The process by which it is applied to brass is termed firing, a process in which the vehicle disappears, and the gold fully displayed on the exterior surface. To this art we owe manifold elegant effects which compensate for the want of malleability in brass, reducing cut and wrought work to certain limits of simplicity. Where the surface of cast brass is so treated in the mold as to take the form that might be produced by a shower of sand, each particle presenting different faces or angles, the effect of this fire gilding is very fine, a multiplicity of minute shades struggling with uplifted points of light, the latter showing continual change, the brightness fading down the slopes.



SUGGESTION FOR PORTIERE

Inlays of stained woods for the ornamentation of wainscoting and furniture imitative of choice hardwoods or rich fancy woods, have hitherto been simply surface stained, and therefore liable to lose their attractiveness by wear or abrasion. Wood to be permeated with colors may be soaked for twenty-four hours in a solution of caustic soda containing ten per cent of soda, then boiled in the same for half an hour, and next washed with sufficient water to remove the alkali. It may then be dyed through the mass, owing to the disintegration of the fibres, producing an elastic leather-like state, which allows it to absorb the color. It is now submitted to pressure in sheets, this pressure enabling it to retain its shape under the cutting tools. An intense black, susceptible of the highest polish, may be produced by the wood being left twenty-four hours in a hot decoction of logwood, the logwood being one third the bulk of the water, and after drying immersing it in a hot solution of copperas, one thirtieth part of copper to the bulk of water. If immersed in a solution of one part of picric acid to sixty parts of water, with a very slight addition of ammonia, the wood will be a yellow color. Coralline dissolved in hot water, to which a little caustic soda, and one-fifth of the volume of soluble glass is added, produces rose color in different shades dependent on the amount of coralline absorbed.



ARABIC FABRIC IN THE MUSEUM AT MADRID.

Without previous treatment of soda, an exceptional case, the veneer wood will take up silver gray by soaking it for a day in a solution of copperas, one part of copperas to one hundred of water. This permeating of wood with color results in the transparent like hue which gives such a charm to rich cabinet woods, the colors figured and plain, which prove so attractive, seeming to come out of their depths. As any density may be obtained by pressure, owing to the previous disintegrating process, soft woods may be used.

In producing mural relief ornaments a great many practical modes are devised by our frescoers. The most complete way is to have the ornament modeled, then a mold taken in sulphur or plaster. On the mold becoming hard the surface is to be oiled with a brush, and the hardening composition, which may consist of plaster of Paris and a strong solution of glue, is poured into the mold. The ornament may be glued or screwed on to the wall, the heads of the screws being sunk and the space left being carefully filled in with the composition. This ornamentation may be applied in sections to represent processional figures on a frieze; on a hall dado a series of flowering plants may be very effectively represented, the frescoer filling in the background, not, however, with much detail. For instance, a mere curve of green, laid on with a bold sweep of the brush, about the lower portion of the stalks of the plants, will sufficiently represent the green sward from which they may be assumed to spring. This relief work allows of great sumptuousness in color. Two powerful colors of equal strength that would otherwise struggle, can be made to blend by weaving over both a close ornament either in gold or else some neutral tint weaker than the colors on which they are applied. With plants the minor stems should be made lighter than the main ones.

When a more rapid result is required in relief work than that above indicated, and where a certain sketchy appearance is no drawback, relief stenciling may be resorted to. For this a thick cardboard stencil is cut, applied to the wall, filled with composition and then taken off. This leaves the ornament on the wall. In preparing the stencil plate, the breaks, which are a necessity to keep it in good shape, should be cleverly and tastefully managed. The best way is to so arrange them that they become features of the ornament, and instead of being a drawback or requiring to be touched up, really help in the general appearance.

The placing of metallic plates showing relief ornament on walls and even ceilings, is a comparatively modern innovation. The facility which casting of the metal affords for duplication is in its favor, particularly for covering extensive spaces, as public halls, assembly rooms, etc. As these plates may be applied of any convenient size a number of sections will often complete one design, thus rendering a general surface less monotonous by reducing the number of repeats. For dados stiles of different pattern from the panels may be introduced, and so also with borders and dividing bands in laying out ceilings.

In looking at the marvellous artistic productions in metal representative of historic, legendary and fanciful scenes, with groups of figures, interiors or landscapes, now produced by German artists, and framed for the purpose of being hung on walls, one could wish that where metallic mural facings are introduced these could find a place, particularly as the central decoration, where the wall is divided off by metallic pilasters. These pilasters, by the way, are very essential features for walls wholly covered by metallic-plaques. The art of decorating metallic plaques with relief work has hitherto been mainly limited to floriated forms, with exception of the architonic aspect given to pilasters, but will doubtless develop into pictorial forms. Already we have medallion heads, but higher art will come to be demanded in designing. The mode of attaching the plates is by flanges turned back from the surface. The wall, whether wood, brick or stone, is covered with plaster of Paris to a thickness of about three-fourths of an inch, and the tiles are forced against it. Bases and architraves are put up in the same way. In these and with wainscoting bronze nails with ornamental heads are used, rather for effect than absolute necessity; these are driven through the thin metal into wood grounds. In many cases very thin metal is used, this being reinforced with a backing of commoner metal.

The metal, brass, copper or bronze is finished in any color from antique brass to deep bronze, or left with the great play of color it has when first from the dye. The result, if properly applied, is both artistic and enduring. For cheaper work iron and zinc are used, and bronzed and colored. When colored it is not deemed essential that the metallic character of the material should be displayed, and it might pass for wood carving except for its abundance, and the unvarying precision of form in the many patterns, or for stucco work except for the sharpness of outline.